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PAGE & SECTION Page 1A + 9A

Firm seeks best alternative in water clean-up

BY ALLISON SMREKAR
TRIBUNE STAFF REPORTER

Testing is continuing to determine the best method to treat contaminated groundwater near the Crooked River Plantation subdivision.

U.S. Navy representatives met last week with residents of the St. Marys subdivision and surrounding areas to discuss ongoing clean-up efforts of groundwater contamination. The Navy is overseeing measures to correct the seepage of vinyl chloride, a known carcinogen, from an old landfill located on Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base near Spur 40.

Officials at the hearing said pilot scale tests are expected to be approved this month and will be conducted over a two-month period in the summer.

"The duration of the initial testing is expected to take approximately two months with very little noise associated with the operation of the equipment," said Bob Steller, Kings Bay deputy public affairs officer.

A system is being designed and tested to purge the affected groundwater. The first step tests whether air stripping or biological treatment is more effective in stopping

See CLEAN-UP, page 9A

Page 1 cont...

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Clean-up: Navy continues groundwater project

■ continued from page 1A

further movement of the contaminated groundwater and for reducing the level of chemicals found in groundwater.

The air stripping process uses simple equipment to transfer the contaminants from the water into the air in a closed system. Because the contaminants tend to easily evaporate to become gases, they are expected to be almost completely removed from the water.

The chemicals that move from the water into the air will then be removed from the air with activated carbon which will attract and hold onto the air-borne chemicals. The activated carbon will then be treated off site.

The biological treatment system will use bacteria to destroy the contaminants. The bacteria are not harmful, and the enzymes they produce are effective at breaking down groundwater contaminants.

The bacteria will be contained in an apparatus known as a rotating biological contractor. This unit will continuously expose the bacteria to the groundwater and to nutrients which will maximize the removal of contaminants.

In addition, environmental scientists expect to collect surface water and sediment samples from a pond in the subdivision, excavate test trenches in the landfill to determine the source of contamination, collect surface soil samples, conduct air monitoring in the landfill and subdivision and conduct two groundwater sampling tests.

Extraction wells were installed in October 1993. The wells are secured with locked covers installed at ground level. The wells are connected to underground piping that runs underneath Spur 40 to the treatment site.

Information on these activities will be available from an information repository and administrative record that will be available in April.

"This is a way for the public to have easy access to documents that are guiding the process," said Ann Johnson of ABB Environmental Services, the private firm hired by the Navy to oversee clean-up efforts. "We are trying to make the information available by April."

The repository will be located at St. Marys Public Library and will be open for viewing Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon.

The Navy started an investigation of Crooked River in January 1992 when vinyl chloride was discovered in groundwater tests.

Vinyl chloride results from the breakdown of solvents and is a carcinogen when inhaled or ingested in high concentrations over a period of time.

While the substance is present in groundwater samples from nine to 57 feet deep, the contamination is not present in drinking water supplies which are taken from deeper reservoirs. The Navy has asked residents to cease use of shallow wells for irrigation and other purposes.

Officials said quantities and toxicity of the contaminant does not pose a substantial health threat to residents living in the area.

Page 2